

Pam.  
Africa



## LABOUR IN AFRICA AND THE PRINCIPLE OF TRUSTEESHIP

To the RIGHT HONOURABLE

VISCOUNT MILNER, G.C.B., G.C.M.G.

A recent Labour Circular in the East Africa Protectorate gave rise to considerable disquiet which found expression in a debate in the House of Lords and in representations made directly to your Lordship. A White Paper (Cmd. 873) containing a Despatch to the Governor of the East Africa Protectorate and other papers has now been issued. While the Despatch manifests a genuine desire to meet sympathetically the objections urged against the policy embodied in the Labour Circular, it does not wholly allay the misgiving which was aroused.

### THE PRINCIPLE OF TRUSTEESHIP

In regard to the fundamental basis of policy there is happily no disagreement. Speaking in the House of Lords on May 13th, 1920, your Lordship stated that you accepted the principle of trusteeship in the government of Crown Colonies and Protectorates, and that as a nation we have to exercise our authority in the interests of the peoples of those countries and not for our own advantage. With this declaration we are in complete accord. The question to which we wish to direct attention is whether the policy represented in the recent White Book is in certain important features compatible with this conception of trusteeship. The issue is one in which much is at stake.

In the Covenant of the League of Nations—largely on the initiative and by the efforts of British statesmen—new public and international recognition has been given to the principle that the well-being and development of subject peoples is a sacred trust of civilisation. We have further in the Covenant given an undertaking to secure just treatment of the native inhabitants of territory under our control. It is a point of honour that these declarations should not in any part of our Empire be permitted to remain a form of words, and that a determined effort should be made to translate them as effectively as possible into administrative practice.

Our Imperial responsibilities in Africa have been greatly enlarged as a result of the war. While in other parts of the Empire the tendency is towards a relaxation of Imperial control, our work in Africa has gained an increased importance and will more and more demand the best that our country has to give. It is of the first moment that this work should be established on righteous, sound, and enduring foundations.

All this we thankfully recognise to be common ground. The disquiet which is widely felt is caused by the apparent incompatibility with these conceptions of recent administrative measures in Kenia Colony and in certain other parts of East Africa.

### COMPULSORY LABOUR FOR PRIVATE EMPLOYERS

We welcome the assurance in the Despatch that "there could be no question of entertaining any proposals" which involve the principle of compulsory labour for private employment, and that "such a policy would be absolutely opposed to the traditional policy of His Majesty's Government." But this repudiation of legal compulsion does not remove the difficulty that the use of the machinery of Government to bring pressure to bear to secure labour for private employers may, just because the pressure is indirect and in some respects undefined, lead in practice to the same undesirable results as the policy of legal compulsion which is repudiated. The authors of the Bishops' Memorandum, quoted in the Despatch, maintain that while in this policy "technically there is no compulsion, practically compulsion could hardly take a stronger form." They felt this so strongly, that

seeing no present means of escaping compulsion in some form, open or veiled, they advocated legal compulsion as a preferable policy on account of the legal safeguards which would accompany it. An illustration of the way in which a system of recruiting which is nominally voluntary may, when administered by native officials, lead to results which are worse than open compulsion, is furnished by Sir Valentine Chirol in his recent volume *The Egyptian Problem*. He calls attention to the embitterment created among the *fellaheen* in Egypt by the methods of recruiting for the labour corps during the war, and expresses the opinion that the frank adoption of a system of conscription which could have been fairly enforced all round would not have done nearly so much harm as "the fiction of volunteering," as the system was worked by the native authorities.

A policy of legal compulsion, as the Despatch states, is absolutely opposed to the traditional policy of His Majesty's Government, and would not be tolerated by British public opinion. But the same reasons which make legal compulsion impossible give rise to serious disquiet in regard to the adoption of a policy which may in practice have the same objectionable results, and which is so liable to abuse that to some of those who have native interests at heart open compulsion with proper safeguards appears a preferable alternative.

### GOVERNMENT OFFICERS AND RECRUITING

The use of the machinery of Government for recruiting labour for private employers places Government officials in a difficult and unfair position. It involves them in a conflict of duties. They are made responsible at the same time for giving effect to the declared wish of the Administration that labour should be provided—of which they are continually reminded by settlers who are in desperate straits to obtain labour—and for guarding against abuses of that pressure by which alone the desired labour can be obtained. Their identification with efforts to recruit labour must weaken, if not destroy, their position in the eyes of the natives as impartial referees, and disturb the relationship, so vital to successful government, in which the natives look up to the Commissioners as their counsellors and friends. The policy creates an even greater difficulty for the native chiefs and headmen, for whom it is scarcely possible to reconcile the instructions to guard against abuses with the insistent demand that labour must be forthcoming. While the instructions in the further circular which has been issued are excellent in intention, there is reason to fear that the general trend of the policy backed by the strong pressure of circumstances will prove too strong to make them effective in practice.

### COMPULSORY LABOUR FOR PUBLIC PURPOSES

The Native Authority Amendment Ordinance 1920 is also a cause of misgiving. The right of Government to call upon the services of individuals for the benefit of the community is not in question. Nor is it denied that this claim may under certain circumstances be made in the form of compulsory labour, provided that the compulsion is for what Lord Cromer describes as "indispensable and recognised purposes of public utility" and is accompanied by all possible safeguards against abuse. But the new amending Ordinance appears to go beyond the very strict limitations under which Lord Cromer believed that forced labour might be accepted as a regrettable necessity.

First, the terms of the new clause are too wide. The purposes (if any) for which compulsory labour is required should be exactly defined. Exception must be taken to the words in this clause which sanction compulsion not only for the provision of porters for government servants and of paid labour on the construction or maintenance of railways and roads, but also "for other work of a like kind to the foregoing or not."

Secondly, Lord Cromer's definition of the purposes for which forced labour may be employed implies that they should be recognised by those who perform the labour as being for the good of the community. African natives, whose sense of the community is limited to their tribe, cannot be expected to regard labour that has to be performed outside the tribal area as having social utility or to under-

stand how it contributes to the general good. The motive which makes forced labour tolerable is lacking, and compulsion for Government is apt to evoke the same feelings of resentment and bitterness as are created by compulsion for private purposes. Recourse to compulsion where the social benefit is not recognized or understood may thus, through the exasperation of native feeling, undermine the foundations of Government which are set in the welfare and contentment of the masses.

Thirdly, the requirement that labour may be demanded for Government work "wherever situated in the Protectorate" is open to the grave objection that it removes natives to a distance from their homes, and thus tends to break up village life. It is not clear whether the 60 days which may be required include the time spent in travelling to and from the place of labour. If not, the period of absence from home may be several months. Compulsory absence from home for a long period must necessarily interfere with the development by the natives of their own land and care for their own affairs. It must prove a continual source of irritation by its interference with both the plans of the individual and the arrangements of the village. Where the recruitment of labour is voluntary those labourers are attracted who can be spared from the villages and no hardship is inflicted on men who desire to remain with their wives and families and who have their own interests to look after.

The objections to compulsion are so great that only the most urgent public necessity can justify recourse to it. Sir Frederick Lugard, in his report on Nigeria (Cmd. 468), states that "the Government policy, being radically opposed to coercion in any form, even for works of such urgency and importance to the country as railways and roads, will not employ it in order to procure labour for private undertakings." Before public opinion in this country could reconcile itself to the adoption of a different policy in other parts of the Empire, it would need to be shown clearly, first, that the needs of labour for public works cannot be met by foresight and organisation, on which private undertakings which cannot have recourse to compulsion must rely; secondly, that the necessary labour cannot be obtained by the offer of better inducements and conditions of work; and, thirdly, if these prove insufficient, that it is essential that the economic development of the country should proceed at a more rapid pace than the education of the people in habits of industry which will gradually produce sufficient voluntary labour.

It is recognised that the Ordinance exempts from compulsion any one who is "fully employed in any other occupation or has been so employed, during the preceding twelve months for a period of three months." Much will depend on the fuller definition of the grounds on which exemption may be claimed. Fears have been expressed lest this provision, taken in conjunction with the policy embodied in the Labour Circular and in particular with the statement that "requirements of native labour for Government departments should be met as far as possible from the more remote areas," may have the effect of driving labour to European farms to escape Government compulsion, which, being for labour at a distance, may be more distasteful. If that were so, the compulsory powers of Government would be an indirect means of compelling labour for private employers. It is, therefore, reassuring to learn from an answer to a question in the House of Commons on October 27th that "if a native has been fully employed in cultivation for himself for three months during the preceding twelve months, he is exempt from the provisions of the Native Authority Amendment Ordinance, 1920." If an assurance can be given that the attention of Government officers will be directed to this interpretation of the Ordinance, and that it will be made widely known to the natives, this will go a considerable way towards allaying misgiving.

### THE PREVENTION OF IDLENESS

The present policy has been defended on the ground that it is beneficial to the natives as well as to the European settlers, inasmuch as its purpose is to prevent idleness, and that it is good for the natives to learn to work. While statements about the idleness of the natives fail often to do justice to the considerable amount of work in their villages which they actually perform, there is no difference of opinion as to the desirability of encouraging the natives in habits

of steady industry. But it by no means follows that the only method of doing this is to force them to seek work on European plantations. Where the conditions of employment are favourable, such labour may have a beneficial and educative effect. But it is also possible to encourage habits of industry by a policy of education within the Reserves, by the demonstration of improved methods of agriculture, and by the development of native industries. Such methods, combined with the attraction of voluntary labour to European farms by proper inducements and good conditions, and the gradual stimulation of needs through contact with a more advanced civilisation, will in time achieve the desired end, without the unfortunate results which beset any attempt unduly to force the pace. When recourse is had to compulsion, a distaste for labour is created and the policy defeats its own end.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF POLICY

Behind questions of the terms and provisions of the Circular and Ordinance there lies an issue of real difficulty and gravity. It arises from the existence in Kenia Colony and in other colonies and protectorates in Africa of two civilisations at very different stages of development. The new labour policy in Kenia Colony is due to the serious shortage of labour on European plantations. The difficulties of the settlers are real and must be viewed with sympathy. The danger is that in the attempt to overcome them the interests of the native population should be sacrificed. This danger is all the greater where, as in Kenia Colony, the European community, who are the employers of labour, have a powerful voice in the government of the country, so that the local administration is constantly subject to pressure from one side, while the labourer's point of view is not effectively expressed. When a conflict of interests arises the European community is in a much more favourable position to make its voice heard and enforce its claims. It is the responsibility of His Majesty's Government, and of the British people whom they represent, to make sure that the interests of the natives, of which they are the trustees, are not permitted to suffer injury.

Any attempt to meet the difficulties arising from the shortage of labour by recourse to compulsion, as the South Africa Native Affairs Commission, 1903-5, pointed out, "is to be deprecated, not only as unjust, but as economically unsound." The inevitable effect of forced labour is to check enterprise and ingenuity, to divert attention from the possibilities of progress through the introduction of labour-saving machinery, and thus to act as a bar to real economic advance. It must also lead to disastrous results in exasperating native feeling and creating discontent and unrest.

But a merely negative policy of opposition to compulsion neither provides a solution of the practical difficulties nor fulfils sufficiently the obligations of trusteeship. The principle of trusteeship implies the duty of fostering in all possible ways the growth of a healthy and independent native life. This includes the assurance to the natives of adequate land with security of tenure and of complete freedom in the disposal of their labour, the furtherance of their economic development, their education in agriculture and industry, and a definite and progressive policy of training them in responsibility and self-government. The main reason for misgiving in regard to certain features of the Labour Circular and ordinance in Kenia Colony is that they seem to be incompatible with the carrying out of such a policy. Compulsion to labour for Government purposes at a distance and pressure to work on European estates, even with the best safeguards, are not easily reconciled with the healthy growth of village life, the fostering of native agriculture and industries, and a continuous policy of native education. Without a clear, resolute and continuous policy on the part of Government directed to the fostering of native life and institutions there is grave danger that the pressing needs of European farms and plantations, together with the requirements of Government, may make such demands on native labour as to lead to the destruction of village life. No greater calamity could overtake the native population. To allow it to take place would be the negation of everything that is implied in the conception of trusteeship. On the other hand, nothing would do more to create a prosperous and contented people, who even

from the economic standpoint are the chief wealth of the country, than by a wise policy of education and fostering of native industries to make the natives feel that they have a real economic advantage from the taxation to which they are liable and from the presence of white men in the country.

It is possible that even after all legitimate means of attracting voluntary labour by the offer of adequate inducements have been exhausted, there may still be a shortage of labour arising from a more rapid development of plantations and farms under European management than is compatible with the natural advance of the native population in civilization and habits of industry. If such a situation has arisen in Kenia Colony the issue should be squarely faced, however great the cost, and the pressure of circumstances should not be allowed to compel the adoption of administrative measures inconsistent with the principle of trusteeship to which as a nation we are committed.

It is of vital importance to us as a nation that we should have a clear and definite policy in regard to the administration of our African Empire, which we know to be consistent with the principle of trusteeship. This is necessary both for the sake of our own good name and also that we may be in a position to exert our proper influence in the counsels of the League of Nations in questions affecting the government of subject peoples. We are bound, moreover, as a Christian nation to bring all national policies to the test of conformity with Christian conceptions of life. Fundamental among these is the conception of the supreme value of human personality and the worth of each individual in the sight of God. We cannot without the surrender of our deepest convictions reconcile ourselves to any policy in regard to the natives of Africa which contravenes this truth.

#### APPOINTMENT OF ROYAL COMMISSION

In view of the widespread misgiving which has been aroused by the recent administrative measures in Kenia Colony (and by recent decrees imposing compulsory labour in the Zanzibar Protectorate) and the apparent lack at present of a clear and consistent policy in regard to the government of subject races based on a reasoned view of the obligations of trusteeship, we appeal to His Majesty's Government to appoint a Royal Commission to inquire into the guiding principles of Imperial policy in the East African Crown Colonies and Protectorates, with special reference to the means by which the principle of trusteeship may be applied to existing conditions in these territories and in particular in regard to:—

- (1) The tenure of land by the natives; and the extent, character, adequacy and inter-communication of native reserves.
- (2) The extent to which land has been alienated to Europeans and the terms on which it is held; the estimated supply of labour necessary to cultivate such land; the capacity of the native population to provide the labour required for government purposes and for European farms and plantations without injury to the healthy development of native life; and the best means of meeting difficulties in regard to the supply of labour.
- (3) The responsibility of officers of Government, British and African, for the supply of labour for private employers.
- (4) The effect of contact with Western civilisation upon the tribal system, the position and authority of chiefs and headmen, native law and custom and native habits and family life; and the best means of dealing with these changes and ensuring a sound and orderly development of native society.
- (5) The economic and moral advancement of the native population, by the teaching of improved methods of cultivation, the development of native industries, the dissemination of a knowledge of health and sanitation, and education generally.
- (6) The proportion of taxation contributed by the native population and the amount expended directly on their moral and material advancement.

7. The best means of obtaining expression of native opinion in matters affecting their interests and adequate representation of these interests in the government of the country, and of training the natives in responsibility and the management of their own affairs.

It is suggested that the inquiry should include Kenia Colony and Protectorate, Uganda, Zanzibar Protectorate, Nyasaland and Tanganyika Territory. The Commission should be empowered to obtain such evidence from other British possessions and from other governments as in their judgment will shed light on the matters to which the inquiry relates.

### PROVISIONAL MEASURES

Pending the result of this inquiry we should welcome a renewed assurance from His Majesty's Government that it is a cardinal aim of its policy to foster in every possible way the growth of a healthy, independent native life, and that the Labour Circular and Native Authority Amendment Ordinance will be interpreted, and if necessary amended, in such a way as to bring them into complete harmony with this policy.

Since it is of the first importance that Government officers should be in a position to judge impartially with regard to conflicting demands for native labour and should continue to be regarded by the natives as disinterested counsellors and friends, we should like to see instructions issued to European officers in Kenia Colony and, if necessary, elsewhere, that while it is their duty to encourage natives in the habits of industry, they are not expected to accept any responsibility for providing labour for private employers; and similar instructions given to native chiefs and headmen.

RANDALL CANTUAR

COSMO EBOR

MATTHEW P. DAVISON,

*President of the Primitive Methodist Church.*

A. E. GARVIE,

*Chairman of the Congregational Union.*

D. J. HILEY,

*Chairman of the Baptist Union.*

DUNCAN C. MACGREGOR,

*Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of England.*

F. B. MEYER,

*President of National Council of Evangelical Free Churches.*

H. SMITH,

*President of the United Methodist Church.*

J. T. WARDLE STAFFORD,

*President of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference.*

THOMAS MARTIN,

*Moderator of the General Assembly of Church of Scotland.*

ALEXANDER MARTIN,

*Moderator of the General Assembly of the United Free Church of Scotland.*

W. J. F. ROBERDS,

*Bishop of Brechin, Primus of the Episcopal Church in Scotland.*

J. MORGAN JONES,

*Moderator of the General Assembly of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists.*

CHARLES F. ARMAGH,  
H. P. GLENN,

*Moderator of the Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in  
Ireland.*

J. H. OLDHAM, KENNETH MACLENNAN,

*Secretaries of the Conference of Missionary Societies in  
Great Britain and Ireland.\**

BALFOUR OF BURLEIGH  
BRYCE  
CAVE  
EMMOTT

SALISBURY

HALDANE  
ISLINGTON  
MAYO  
MESTON

W. ADAMSON  
J. R. CLYNES  
W. E. ELLIOT  
ARTHUR HENDERSON  
SAMUEL HOARE

E. HILTON YOUNG

ROBERT NEWMAN  
J. H. THOMAS  
J. H. WHITLEY  
R. WILLIAMS  
E. F. L. WOOD

WM. ASHLEY  
W. G. S. ADAMS  
C. S. ADDIS  
ERNEST BARKER  
MARGARET G. BONDFIELD  
LOUISE CREIGHTON  
A. A. DAVID  
W. H. DICKINSON  
T. R. FERENS  
W. H. GREY  
W. L. HICHENS  
ROBT. L. HOLT  
GEORGE J. LE HUNTE  
WALTER LOCK  
EDITH L. LYTTTELTON  
DONALD MACALISTER

JOSEPH PATON MACLAY  
JOHN MANN  
FRED L. M. MOIR  
RAMSAY MUIR  
GILBERT MURRAY  
GEORGE PARKIN  
CHARLES ROBERTS  
MICHAEL E. SADLER  
GEORGE ADAM SMITH  
W. R. SORLEY  
W. A. SPOONER  
R. H. TAWNEY  
J. J. THOMSON  
CHARLES K. WEBSTER  
BEATRICE WEBB  
ALFRED E. ZIMMERN

---

\*Thirty-one Missionary Societies associated in the Conference have given their formal approval to this Memorandum.

THE  
OF THE

THE

THE

THE

THE

THE

THE